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FILE

## DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

9 October 1987

The Indo-Sri Lankan Peace Accord:  
 Praying at The Edges

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## Summary

Indian troops in Sri Lanka have moved against Tamil militants to try to keep the peace in the Northern and Eastern Provinces and uphold India's side of the accord. Indian Prime Minister Gandhi assured Sri Lankan President Jayewardene that India would take action after Tamil militants began attacks against both Sinhalese civilians and Indian forces. New Delhi almost certainly recognizes that sustained Tamil militant-inspired violence will lead to a Sinhalese backlash against the accord and force Jayewardene to question India's commitment to enforcing the accord. India also wants to ensure peace so the 130,000 Tamil refugees in southern India will return to Sri Lanka.

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India's immediate problem is curbing the main Tamil militant group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Tigers initially indicated support for the accord, but now seem to be testing their ability to squeeze more concessions out of the Sri Lankan government. During the last month they have shifted back and forth between political negotiations and confrontation. They succeeded in getting Colombo to agree to their having

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NESA M 87-20098

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a majority of the 12 seats on an interim provincial council. In early October, however, the Tigers abandoned accommodation and began attacking Sinhalese settlers in the Eastern Province, reviving some of the guerrilla tactics they used at the height of the insurgency. They also made their first attacks on Indian troops. [redacted]

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The Tigers probably want to push Sinhalese out of the Eastern Province. By increasing the proportion of Tamils in the region, the Tigers almost certainly calculate they can influence a referendum next year that will decide whether both the east and the Tamil-dominated north remain administered by a single provincial council. Indian plans to move the Tamil refugees from India to Sri Lanka, which are already underway, will exacerbate the Tamil-Sinhalese tension in the east. [redacted]

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Animosity between Sri Lankan Tamil and majority Sinhalese populations will remain the most difficult issue for the Indians to address. Continuing inter-communal rioting almost certainly will result in Indian troops being caught in the middle policing both communities. Gandhi said in a recent interview that he would not rule out a "more aggressive role" for Indian troops on the island to try to prevent such violence. [redacted]

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Indian troops likely will remain on the island at least until early next year. New Delhi wants to oversee the election for the provincial council scheduled for this December. Efforts by Indian troops to prevent rioting will also help Jayewardene fend off challenges to the accord by Sinhalese hardliners who provoked some of the intense anti-government rioting early last August. New Delhi regards Jayewardene as the linchpin of Sri Lankan backing for the accord and will seek to minimize hardline Sinhalese opposition to Jayewardene by controlling anti-Sinhalese violence. India may decide to keep troops on the island through December 1988 to reduce the chances for Tamil-Sinhalese clashes during balloting on the future status of the combined Northern and Eastern Provinces. [redacted]

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#### India's Longterm Interests

Gandhi's move in Sri Lanka underscores India's determination to be the dominant regional power in South Asia. We do not, however, believe Gandhi or his advisers have a "Greater India" in mind. New Delhi may instead aspire to a relationship with Colombo that resembles its ties to Nepal, over which India exercises strong influence. Sri Lankan President Jayewardene, however, has retained authority over Sri Lanka's foreign policy throughout the Indian intervention. [redacted]

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Gandhi also sees several domestic benefits to the accord. His efforts to bring peace for Sri Lankan Tamils will help him build support among Tamils in southern India, where the ruling Congress Party has been weakest. India also believes peace will ease the way for the resettlement of the approximately 130,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees living in south India. Over the last several years, tension has been growing between the refugees and the local population. [REDACTED]

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#### Implications for the United States

The peace accord includes language New Delhi could invoke to press Colombo to reduce US ship visits and prevent construction of a large Voice of America (VOA) facility on the island. India has not, however, pushed Jayewardene on either issue since the signing of the accord. US ship visits to Sri Lanka have continued and New Delhi seems assured by statements from Jayewardene and Washington that the VOA station is not intended for military or intelligence purposes. [REDACTED]

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India's regional neighbors are puzzled by US support for the accord and worry that India will believe it can use force elsewhere in the region without international censure. Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh all have voiced concern about whether India would intervene in their countries as it did in Sri Lanka. Officials around the region point to India's accession of Sikkim and control over Bhutanese foreign policy as possible precedents for an Indian plan of hegemony over the subcontinent. [REDACTED]

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NESA M 87- 20098

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